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SUMMARY

On the assumption that a woman's physical and mental condition at childbirth is a product of her life-long daily habits and ideas as well as any particular injunctions set up to insure well-being in pregnancy and parturition, the cultural scene was searched to ascertain all possible relevancies.

The farmers of Bang Chan lived in a tropical, rice-growing terrain, annually flooded by the monsoon run-off. Food was plentiful even if cash was not. Except for better housing and equipment, and a greater enjoyment of market novelties, the rich lived much like the poor. The work in the fields by women paralleled that by men. Sharp physical demands, especially at planting and harvest, made them muscular.

At marriage the partners were fully mature and no woman was married against her wishes. The birth of a child was welcomed as leading to higher personal, social, and economic status.

The underlying concepts which explain why the food and other injunctions, both pre-natal and post-partum, and the ritual behavior took their particular forms, are explained.

The human body, harboring multiple immaterial souls, was seen as composed of earth, fire, water, and wind. Illness was caused by intrusive disruption of these four elements, or by soul loss. Food and medicines had properties which could be used to restore balance in the elements. The traditional curers or exorcisers had magical and herbal remedies obtained ritually from a teacher. Since Buddhist phrasings, often read from old texts in weekly sermons, molded Bang Chan's conception of life, the ultimate cause of health or illness was the presence or absence of merit. This determined one's kam (karma), the balance sheet of virtuous actions which one added to, or reduced by sinning throughout successive existences over eons of time.

The Buddhist cosmic view of individuals as separate autonomous beings brought it about that help was the only dynamic relationship possible between people. The bonds established by helping people, on this earth, especially in the tasks of feeding priests, lasted on into successive incarnations. Thus, meritorious people met again and might marry again. Families had continuity over time, and babies were born into the "right"

Within the community all women received about the same service. Though the poor felt the 20 to 30 baht cost[5] of a midwife was too expensive, and so utilized the free help of a compassionate kinsman (usually the mother) or neighbor, the latter sometimes were as expert manually as a midwife or even on their way to becoming one. The few critical cases, rich or poor, who were taken to the Minburi Health Center managed to pay the 60 to 70 baht fee (120 baht if penicillin were used).

General Attitudes Towards Having Children

In these farm families, children were an asset, for their help, skills, and earnings enriched the family. Boys and girls were equally desired. A girl did household chores and at her marriage brought in the considerable payment of "milk money." A boy could be ordained and so "bring merit" to his parents. Both could farm, and both would provide cherishing care to the parents in their old age, but this was expected particularly of daughters. A child usually arrived within a year or so of marriage, to the rejoicing of everyone. Until the birth of a child, marriage only partially changed the young couple's status, especially if they were still living under the parental roof. With children they became the heads of a family, with authority over, and responsibility for, a younger generation. In the few polygymous households, the position of a younger wife was enhanced when she bore a child. Sometimes on the birth of this or another child, the money paid to the bride's parents at the time of the wedding was turned over to the new mother. Title to some of the familial land, never given until a marriage had proved stable, might be conveyed to one spouse or the other. The arrival of a child was sometimes a signal for preparations for moving out and establishing an independent household, or for establishing a "second kitchen," i.e. two separate families living under a single roof. A study of the birth-rituals (Chap.V) gives evidence that the arrival of a child, especially the first, was of deep psychological and social significance to the parents. The marriage bonds were strengthened if the first-born were male (cf. p. 65). A couple without children was "sad" and "a little less rich." Barrenness was caused by lack of merit.

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5. Analysis of Janlekha's figures, borne out in observation, shows that per capita income was low, that there were many poor people, and because of the seasonal nature of income, even the rich were short of cash (1955:135-143). Ninety-two baht were the average "expenses for medicine" including delivery fees (1955:142).

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called out "Mine!" ("khǭng chan" [female speaking] or "phom" [male speaking]). Never did a parent say "ours!"[44] Sometimes the mother might ask a relative or friend present to claim the child, and so become a godparent.

As the first human step to control the volatile khwan, the first objective of winnowing a baby was to seize it (kan rap khwan) and so "complete" the child's person.[45] By tying holy thread at the wrist and ankle soul-exits, the khwan which had flitted in and out of the womb was given root. It was still flighty, but now it had a life-long home.

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Secondly, the child was given membership in a human family. Connection through blood and semen did not establish kinship. At first, the child hovered between corporeal and non-corporeal existence. "The child is not fully human for the first 3 days." This period was under the supernatural control of Mother Sǖ, for babies "never died during the first 3 days after birth. They might be born dead or they died 6 or 7 days later." The shock of dropping the child on the tray "made him forget his life as a spirit." When somone cried "mine!" the child finally cut his relationship with the spirit-world. As an old woman explained, "The ties are the important part [of the ceremony]. They show that the child belongs to someone. Once a tie fell off one wrist. The child cried and cried until it was restored," fearing its lost khwan would attach itself elsewhere. The claiming set up kinship as a contract before witnesses. Whoever announced responsibility for the child's care, and this was usually the mother, deserved reciprocal care in old age. Other relatives would also help to bring him through to maturity. He would not be so frightened of an evil spirit because of family support, nor of the "ghost of an ancestor" who would be recognized as a relative.

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Third, the ceremony strengthened the child. By giving him through the ties a stable khwan, he "grew better, cried less, and did not get sick."

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The incorporation of as many auspicious elements as possible into the ritual was customary. Since the child took

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44. A winnowing tray (basket) had the capacity to "trap" spirits. It could seize or trap not only the khwan soul, but, at New Year's, one of the fun ghosts (Textor:371).

45. There is no convenient way of expressing "ours" in Thai in this restricted sense (id.).

phlai and bamboo cutter under the house "so the child would not roam away from home." The circumcision (akiko) performed up to the eleventh year, allied a child to a human group. "Circumcision is to accept the new-born baby into the status of human beings" In a corresponding ceremony for girls, the To Iman "cut a little piece of the labia." However, some Muslims had the full winnowing ceremony performed. If it were not, the child was raised aloft in the midwife's hands with the words, "Mother Sī, Mother Sāk, may this child be cool and happy!" The new-born baby was then laid in a cloth cradle. Fruits were hung over the tray or cradle. If a lactating Muslim mother accepted another's child to nurse, the 2 babies had to be of the same sex "lest later in life they marry, in which case theirs would be an incestuous, brother-sister marriage." The Buddhists entertained no such idea, so nursed babies of either sex as needed. A Muslim view of colostrum as "like pus from a sore" carried a more negative overtone than the Buddhist's statement: "At first the mother's milk is too dilute to be useful."

At the annual homage of a Muslim midwife to her teacher each of her patients of the year sent a kilogram of sugar, one coconut, one or 2 liters of glutinous rice, and a hen (if a baby girl had been born) or a rooster (if a boy). The chicken was killed by the midwife and made into curries for mosque officials (men) invited to the ceremony. The incense and candles were burned "while she thinks of her teacher."

4:Phillips E-4,5 (1956-1957) 1966
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career. From an epistemological point of view, there is of course nothing strange about such an approach. What is perhaps somewhat unique, however, is that the villagers actually use it as the point of departure in their treatment of the child.

The practical consequences of these equalitarian notions are manifold. For one thing, with the child defined as a separate and equal soul, the relationship between parent and child takes on a highly instrumental flavor; that is, rather than expressing love toward the child as an end in itself or otherwise treating him in ways that require no further justification (it is assumed that love is characteristically an absolute sentiment, not a means to any other satisfaction) villagers explicitly see the relationship between parent and child in contractual terms. Thus villagers say that they "are going to the trouble" of bringing up their children and "doing good things for them" (just as their own parents "went to the trouble" of bringing them up and "doing good things" for them) so that they will have someone to care for them in their old age and make merit for them when they die. Similarly, they say they love their parents because they are indebted to them for bringing them into the world. The language of the "contract" is poignantly explicit: "When I think of my mother, I think of the debt I owe her for bringing me into the world and feeding me so I would survive"; "Parents who do not teach their children how to *waj* [exhibit respect to the parents] get nothing from them. I did many *bunkhuns* [good things requiring reciprocation] for my daughter, so now she gives me everything"; "When I was three my father gave me to my uncle who fed me and trained me, so I loved my uncle more" (cf. pp. 64–66, L. M. Hanks 1959c, and Phillips 1959 for further documentation of this point).

In and of themselves there is nothing strange about these "contractual" criteria. However, they do reflect a fundamental recognition of the independence of parent and child and of the fact that parent and child have the *option* of fulfilling each other's needs. More specifically, they are expressions of the assumption that there is nothing intrinsic to the parent-child relationship that requires the two persons to be linked together. The relationship clearly is not fortuitous, but neither is it absolute. It functions primarily for the instrumental and symbiotic satisfactions that its participants can gain from it.[28] Lacking the absolute elements of an ultimate

[28] In his paper on "Changes in Family Life" in Bang Chan (1959c) L. M. Hanks notes: "At birth a parent ceremonially formally accepts obligations to an unknown infant soul lightly bound to its body; to this point the new-born one without relation to its parent has been under the protection of a spirit mother. This phrasing contrasts sharply with the Occidental concept of 'flesh and blood.'" In another place in the manuscript, Hanks also comments: ". . . but every case [every kinship tie] is reducible, if one presses the question, to benefits of an older or richer or stronger for the